Reconciliation Paradigm in the Post Colonial Africa: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract
The article sets out to stir up the debate on reconciliation project in the post colonial Africa. As we strategise on ways and means of delivering the promise of reconstruction, there is need to pay more attention on the reconciliation for individual and society. In other words, does reconciliation mean blanket forgiveness or reparation? How can we ensure that those who looted Africa account for their misdeeds without further complicating the situation? The article is set on the premise that even though there are many paradigms in African theology of the twenty-first century, minor paradigms (refer to reconciliation, liberation, inculturation, market-theology and charismatic among others) and the dominant paradigm (refer to reconstruction) are both critical in the holistic rebuilding of the post colonial Africa. This said; it is imperative to critically assess reconciliation as an important paradigm – as it runs concurrently with other paradigms in Africa today. In particular, are the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions taking place in various countries of the tropical Africa, since Tutu's South African sample of 1995, rooted in African cultural and religious heritage, and hence authentic? How can Africa go about her reconciliative phase?

Keywords
reconciliation, paradigms in African theology, minor and dominant paradigms, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions

1. Introduction

Reconciliation literally means repairing the damaged or broken bonds of unity and friendship between God and humanity and between human beings and their fellow beings on a personal and also on a communal level. In the words of Charles Villa-Vicencio, reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness; for forgiveness implies the healing of the psychological and spiritual scars of past suffering.¹ He quotes Pope John Paul II, who argues that forgiveness

involves “the purification of memory” – a situation within which the past no longer has a negative impact on the present. In Villa-Vicencio’s view, “most nations never attain this deeper level of inner peace – and perhaps they should not”. For him thus, justice in most nations is always in tension with genuine reconciliation.

This drives us to wonder: does this mean that there is no “genuine” reconciliation where humanity, or even God, “forgives and forgets”? What is the role of Christ in justifying the “sinner”? How does the traditional African society view reconciliation. Is the African traditional approach to reconciliation and the Christological approach to reconciliation compatible?

2. Reconciliation Paradigm in African Context

Certainly, a historical survey will ascertain the fact that reconciliation has been attempted through diverse approaches. For instance, an African approach to reconciliation is seen as taking place among individuals; between God and human beings or even between the various neighbouring ethnic groupings – who at times could be under tension or war. Again, it is expressed through African philosophies (read *Ubuntu*), eating together sessions, ceremonial rituals and sacrifices, community dance, proverbs, riddles, oral narratives, and through songs.

An important case study, in our recent African history is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). In turn, the TRC which was formed after the newly elected National Assembly passed the “Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act” in May 1995, best illustrates how crucial the paradigm of reconciliation is in modern day Africa. For in this TRC, the perpetrators of apartheid and other previous human rights violations were called upon to account for their misdeeds. Depending on the recommendations of the committee, most of the previous offenders were reconciled to the rest of the society after confessing their misdemeanour to humanity. In other words, they were “forgiven” after confessing their guilt and after denouncing their evil past. The Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu – whom Wole Soyinka describes

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as “the moving spirit behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”\(^5\) – chaired the South African TRC.

Conversely, Tinyiko Maluleke contends that the whole philosophy behind the TRC was not original to South Africa – as it had been tried elsewhere albeit with modifications – especially in Latin America.\(^6\) The South African Parliament set up the TRC with the mandate to establish “as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights committed under apartheid from March 1960 to December 1993 (later extended to May 1994) by conducting investigations and holding hearings.”\(^7\) This Seventeen-member commission consisted of three committees. One, The Human Rights Violations Committee, which was to investigate gross violations of human rights. Second, The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee that was to formulate a reparation policy and restore and rehabilitate the lives of victims and survivors of violations. Third, The Amnesty Committee that had the power to grant amnesties on condition that the applicant made a full disclosure of the facts.\(^8\)

In March 2003, after seven years of hearing testimony about the apartheid era, the TRC formally released its recommendation that the South African government pass laws obliging the corporate world to make restitutions for the wrongs of the apartheid era. This clearly divided South Africa into two political constituencies. That is, big business – which is still largely dominated by Africans of European descent (read whites) – and the victims of apartheid – who are the vast majority of the Black Africans. Interestingly, the erstwhile President Thabo Mbeki’s response was two-pronged. For on 15 April 2003, his government announced that it would make a one-time payment of reparations; it also made some symbolic gestures, such as announcing the foundation of a national memorial day and the construction of some liberation monuments. But on the other hand, Mbeki rejected the TRC’s calls for a corporate tax to fund wider-scale reparations, and criticized lawsuits that had been filed against multinational corporations based in the United States.\(^9\) His refusal to support the tax and lawsuits was seen as a victory for the South African business interests – of the Africans of European descent (whites) who are said to dominate


\(^6\) Maluleke, “Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa,” 110.

\(^7\) Lipton, “Democracy and Stability in the New South Africa,” 60.

\(^8\) Lipton, “Democracy and stability in the new South Africa,” 60.

the South African economy. In view of this, the question has always been posed by the critiques of TRC, “was there genuine reconciliation without mass reparations?”

Villa-Vicencio disagrees with those who argue that Tutu’s Commission did not bring the process of reconciliation. He says that true reconciliation occurs when a society is no longer paralyzed by the past and people can work and live together. He says, “a noisy and informed debate about the complicity and crimes of the apartheid era is necessary, even if uncomfortable”. For him thus, an environment that encourages debate or/and “noise” is in the process of attaining the goal of being reconciled to itself. For the goal of reconciliation is normally achieved in the process of hard work.

Villa-Vicencio goes on to explain that there is no blueprint for initiating or jump-starting the reconciliation process. For in some cases, the alienation of between the concerned groups can be so deep that it may require the respective adversaries to stare into the looming abyss of destruction to discover that they need one another to survive. At another time, a moment of sanity may emerge. Characteristically, both moments require each team to recognise the humanity of each other. Undoubtedly, this necessarily takes time.

Nevertheless, this trend of forming Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions, a precedent set by South Africa, has been hailed all over Africa by the church and the civil society – as the best way forward in a continent characterised by wars, genocide, xenophobia, corruption, general violence, economic strangulation, sectionalism, and bad governance. After South Africa, a TRC was later launched in Ghana after the then opposition leader, John Agyekum Kufuor, won in a democratic election in December 2000 and was subsequently sworn in as president on January 7, 2001. Ghana’s reconciliation commission was referred to as the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) – which was formed to examine the abuses that took place under the leadership of Kufuor’s predecessor, retired President Jerry Rawlings. Another case is that of Sierra Leone’s truth commission (SLTC) which wondered how combatants in the country’s brutal civil war could “slice open the wombs of pregnant women and amputate villagers’ limbs in the name of a senseless civil war”. A Kenyan reconciliation commission was also set up in 2008 following massive violence and displacements that took place after the post December 27, 2007 disputed

10 Villa-Vicencio, Walk With Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009), 171.
presidential elections – which handed over victory to the incumbent, President Emilio Mwai Kibaki.

With the recent African history being littered with memories like the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the civil war in Congo and the Democratic republic of Congo, the civil war between Biafra and Nigeria in 1967, the civil war in Chad in the 1980s, the civil war in Sudan between the South and the North, and the prolonged war between Ethiopia and Eritrea that ended in 1991 but keeps on recurring, the May 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa, among others, Africa may be forced to learn from South Africa’s TRC.14 And in turn, South Africa, the once scorned country, may now become the cornerstone of African theology whose motif must necessarily be praxiological – as it is from there that an African theology of reconciliation has emerged. It is no wonder that Maluleke perceptively contends that no sooner had “our TRC wrapped up its work than we realised that reconciliation in South Africa is incomplete and meaningless unless it encompasses not only Southern Africa but the rest of the African continent as well”.15 Writing in 2005, five years before South Africa hosted the soccer world cup, Maluleke saw TRC as having been one of South Africa’s “most marketable and exportable products. We now look forward to hosting the world’s biggest sporting event, namely the soccer world cup in 2010.”16 Further, Brigalia Bam, a South African theologian, rightly sees TRC, and its reconciliation role, as part of reconstruction.17 At this stage, it is critical to appreciate that even though reconciliation and reconstruction in the South African case appears like one single paradigm, this article holds that this is not necessarily the case for other African states or the world at large. For there are those who require reconstruction and not necessarily reconciliation or vice versa. In any case, the biblical Nehemiah’s reconstruction project did not put much emphasis on reconciliation with the former oppressors or with the Jews who did not go to exile. And since socio-political events tend to influence theological articulation (as seen in the European age of Enlightenment and in the African struggles for political independence), the South African TRC may have its own impact in the African theology of the twenty-first century C.E.

3. An Analysis of Reconciliation Paradigm

In analysing the theology based on the paradigm of reconciliation, the Nigerian born Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, has highlighted the theme of forgiveness in his African studies. First, he firmly rejects Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s model of truth as reconciliation and warns, "Saints are dangerous for your health."\(^{18}\) He wonders:

How on earth does one reconcile reparations, or recompense, with reconciliation or remission of wrongs? Dare we presume that both, in their differing ways, are committed to ensuring the righting of wrongs and the triumph of justice?\(^{19}\)

He goes on to say:

Would the Truth and Reconciliation ethic have been applicable, even thinkable in post-Acheampong Ghana? In post-Mobutu Zaire? Will it be adaptable in post-Abacha Nigeria? That circumstances may make such a proceeding expedient is not to be denied, but we must not shy away from some questions: would it be just? And, more important, how does it implicate both the present and the future?\(^{20}\)

For the whole of Africa, Soyinka sees genuine reparation as that which must involve the acceptance by Western nations of a moral obligation to repatriate the post-colonial loot salted away in their vaults, "in real estate, business holdings, and cover ventures by those African leaders who have chosen to follow the European precedent in the expropriation of a continent".\(^{21}\) For the plunder could never have been possible or would not have reached such mammoth portions, without the collaboration of those same commercial centres of Europe and, lately, the wealthier Arab nations. In other words, “the wealth of the Mobutus, the Babangidas, the Abachas, but also the de Beers, Shell Surrogates Incorporated, etc. of the continent should be utilized as down payment, as evidence of internal moral cleansing, that would make any claims for worldwide reparations irreproachable”.\(^{22}\)

In Ben Knighton’s view, Soyinka advocates “an equilibrium of reparation and forgiveness theology”\(^{23}\). That means the offenders should make restitution to the oppressed community, who are given the choice to decide whether it

\(^{18}\) Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, 23ff.

\(^{19}\) Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, 23–24.

\(^{20}\) Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, 19.

\(^{21}\) Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, 86.

\(^{22}\) Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, 87.

makes “a sufficient closure of the offence to let go the full demands of retributive justice”.24 Accordingly, reconciliation can only come through behaviour-changing forgiveness, “but forgiveness is normally possible only after restitution”.25 To build his case further, Soyinka cites the case of the year 1990 when he had been invited to Trinidad and Tobago’s celebrations of her hundredth anniversary of Emancipation – the formal end of slavery. During that period, a coup d’état was staged.26 And in the uncertain atmosphere that followed this coup, some Trinidadians went on a looting spree. After some three or four days of stalemate, the police got tired of the waiting game with the captors and their hostages. And in taking the advantage of the independent radio that had escaped seizure, the Chief of Police went on air and lectured the people of the Island of Trinidad on their “evil ways”.27 And in a no-nonsense speech, he reminded them that their looting was unTrinidadian and warned that it would not be tolerated. Consequently, he gave them forty-eight hours to return the looted property. He said, “Just lay down your loot in front of your houses. We will come round and collect them, and return them to their owners. . . . So return your loot, and let Trinidad return to herself.”28 Soyinka afterward drove round with a friend and could hardly believe his eyes; for the goods were laid down neatly in front of houses. As he saw, “Wheelbarrows were trundling through the streets in reverse directions, filled with clothing, toys, appliances, etc. The rum and beer were of course never recovered, but even the shopkeepers did not seriously expect to see such items restored to their shelves in undepleted forms”.29 For him therefore restitution in Africa is possible – as was the case with the Island of Trinidad.

In Soyinka’s view, thus, others cannot securely follow the path of South Africa, where no comprehensive reparation took place after apartheid. Rather, he cites the case of the return of hundreds of stolen cattle among the pastoralist tribes of Sudan. That is, the Nuer and the Dinka30 – after eight years of conflict within the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.31 Soyinka’s view receives some support from A. Leslie Milton when he remarks that,

24 Knighton, “Forgiveness or Disengagement in a Traditional African Cycle of Revenge,” 18.
26 Soyinka, The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness, 76.
27 Soyinka, The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness, 79.
28 Soyinka, The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness, 79.
29 Soyinka, The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness, 79.
30 Both tribes are Nilotic by race.
31 It is essential to acknowledge that both communities have united and are in the Unity Government of Sudan after the late John Garang successfully signed a Unity pact with the government of Sudan. Before then, the SPLA operated as rebels seeking autonomy from the government which was predominantly made of the Muslim Northerners – who were mainly Arabs.
Moreover, as recent criticisms of the lack of white participation in the “Truth and Reconciliation” proceedings have shown, there is at least a perception that among many in the white community, “reconciliation” means refusing to dig up the past. They are looking forward in hope to a new future in which the sins of the old dispensation are no longer spoken of. Put differently, for some, reconciliation has already been effected through the renunciation of minority rule. For others, reconciliation is still a future prospect, to be established through the establishment of social justice growing out of political freedom. For as long as the idea of “reconciliation” remains unreconciled, the very concept will be a focus of division rather than unity.\(^3^2\)

Soyinka thus sees the South African way of reconciliation as merely a time-bomb that can explode – as the root cause of the problem was not solved but shelved – as those who took the “cattle” did not return it to the owners. Perhaps in answering Soyinka, Tutu acknowledges that they opted for amnesty as a way of drawing perpetrators into the new society. He further says that they did not fully succeed in this regard. It is, at the same time, clear that,

We could not have succeeded in persuading the country’s former political leaders and generals in the security forces to sit down at the negotiation table if they knew they would have their day in court and be required to spend time in prison. So on balance, I think we did the right thing. We said peace is more important than fulfilling the niceties of punitive justice…. We traded truth for justice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not offer blanket amnesty or crass impunity, and I continue to believe that there is a place for the prosecution of those who refuse to acknowledge their complicity in evil…. if those guilty of gross violations of human rights do, however, seek to live a new life and contribute to transforming the country, then we need to talk with them and where necessary strike a deal.…. We still have a long way to go, but we have made a start.\(^3^3\)

In writing a foreword in Charles Villa-Vicencio’s book, *Walk With Us and Listen*, Tutu avers thus:

Peace building is not an easy process [as Soyinka seems to imply!]. No single intervention by the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, or the African Union is enough to give Africans the cherished prize of peace and relative prosperity. The book fits into the philosophy that underlies the international Council of Elders that it is my privilege to chair. It poses vital questions concerning the need for the Court and local initiatives for justice and peace to find common ground. The international community can help bring


\(^3^3\) D. Tutu, introduction to *Walk with Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa*, by C. Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009), x.
peace to situations such as those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Indeed, the United Nations, the African Union, and neighbouring countries have often been far too reluctant to confront tyrants, dictators, and warmongers in such countries. Where dictators, criminals, and perpetrators fail to respond to reason, the international community needs to pressure them to do so, and where necessary they need to face the International Criminal Court’s full wrath. Where offenders are not prepared to acknowledge past wrongs, as is the case with President Robert Mugabe, they need to be removed from office. They cannot have it both ways.\(^{34}\)

Tutu’s TRC model is thus pragmatic and could not be easily dismissed as a mere religious nonsense or political obscurantism. For as in the case of Charles Villa-Vicencio’s view, Tutu avers that reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness “and that former enemies and adversaries need not forgive one another in order to live together in an acceptable manner”. This level of political reconciliation is, “of course, an essential start to any peace process”\(^{35}\) – as there is always a need to strive further. Villa-Vicencio however is critical of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which concentrates its attention on the atrocities of certain African countries to the neglect of the world’s major powers and their allies, whose track record on human rights abuses is decidedly not beyond question. He goes on to suggest that interventions by the Court in Africa and elsewhere are important in terms of international jurisprudence, “but they frequently fail to give sufficient attention to building relations between the communities involved in conflict, which is a prerequisite for sustainable peace”.\(^{36}\)

This leads us to consider the case for a home grown African approach to reconciliation.

In seeking to explore a home-grown model of reconciliation, it is imperative to appreciate that, forgiveness in Africa is not just an individual affair. Rather, it is inherently a communal quality that has bearing on individuals and groups. The difficulty of “forgiveness without reparation” as a back-up to reconciliation paradigm, in Africa, is put under a litmus test in Knighton’s research among the Northern-Western Kenya and North-Eastern Uganda communities. He says that there are various feuds among the communities who are pastoralists. He says:

> On 24th January 2000, 700 Pian Karamojong (of North-East Uganda) with AK47 assault rifles raided the herds of 2,000 Pokot in Kenya, killing 14 – 100 including women and children. The raiders made off with 1,800 head of cattle, 5,000 sheep and goats, as well as camels. The counter-raiding continued while I stayed with the Pian, who were selling the cattle in Namalu market in case

\(^{34}\) Tutu, Introduction, xi.

\(^{35}\) Tutu, Introduction, ix.

state authorities should come looking for oxen branded by the Pokot. Ever since they became neighbours, raiding has gone on intermittently not only between Karamojong and Pokot, but also them and Jie, Dodos, Turkana, Samburu, Marakwet, Sapiny or Sabawoot, and Bukusu. In June 2000 within Karamoja, Dodos raided the Jie...37

The most worrying factor is that those who raid successfully not only gain wealth in cattle, but also their status in the community. They can now marry more wives – as young women who want to seek secure and well-provided homes would find it acceptable to be taken as second or third wives. From this, can the cattle rustlers be forgiven merely because of their confessions of guilt without making them to return the animals they have taken? How, in this case, can reconciliation in Africa be done? How can a theology of reconciliation be constructed – considering that some in society treats cattle-rustlers as their ethnic heroes and/or heroines?

Interestingly, Wole Soyinka has two main resources for reconciliation. The first one is legal – where the external arbitrators or adjudicators can deal with issues of justice in order to heal the wounds as they seek to make peace. Surprisingly, his second resource is religious myth. In his specific case, he turns to his ancestral Yoruba pantheon and to their rituals that express the myths. In this, the gods come down to the mortals to oversee the atonement festival – reminding the human beings of the necessity for atonement and forgiveness.38 He says,

Most African traditional societies have established modalities that guarantee the restoration of harmony after serious infractions – see, for instance, the banishment of Okonkwo after involuntary homicide in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. And, if we may be somewhat whimsical, Emperor Bokassa’s bizarre return to Central African Republic, in full knowledge of what fate awaited him, argues strongly for some kind of supernatural intervention – the vengeful souls of the violated children dragging him back from the security of his French asylum? Certainly, a singularly atrocious act appeared to be denied closure until the perpetrator returned to expiate on the scene of the crime. Maybe, in the sphere of abominations, (African) nature does abhor a vacuum. Are we then perhaps moving too far ahead of our violators in adopting a structure of response that tasks us with a collective generosity of spirit, especially in the face of ongoing violations of body and spirit?39

Soyinka’s rejection of Truth and Reconciliation Committee of South Africa however fails to take cognisance of the fact that human reparation has “seldom

37 Knighton, “Forgiveness or Disengagement in a Traditional African Cycle of Revenge,” 19.
39 Soyinka, The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness, 13–14.
initiated reconciliation in any communal conflict in Africa or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{40} Even the ordering of Germany to pay reparations for the First World War, in 1919, did not stop Adolf Hitler from forming his Triple Entente with Japan (Italy – later joined allies) or Berlin-Rome-Tokio Axis – which finally fought their rivals – the Triple Alliance group or Churchill’s group which was composed of UK, France and Commonwealth during the Second World War, 1939–45.\textsuperscript{41} In any case, the demand for restitution can foster resentment and hostility. And as Martin Luther King, Jr once said,

\ldots Through violence you may murder a murderer but you cannot murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar but you cannot establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you cannot murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.\ldots \textsuperscript{42}

Certainly, the ancient African society had clear procedures through which conflicts were resolved, a phenomenon that is not intact in some parts of Africa today. In particular, there were selected individuals and groups within the society who were designated as the mediators and restorers of peace whenever conflicts went out of hand.\textsuperscript{43} Among the Kikuyu society, there was the council of peace (\textit{ndundu ya athuri} or \textit{athuri a kiama}) which was made up of the most respected elders. The reason for their being respected was due to their being viewed as just, honest, truthful, and incorruptible. The council was tasked with the role of ensuring a peaceful co-existence in the society – to promote an ideal society where no one was “from the stomach while the other one was from the back”, hence the Kikuyu proverb: \textit{Gutiri wanda na wamugongo}, that is, “all are equal as all human beings come through the womb.” In the nature of things, the Council resolved disputes that went beyond the family unit. It listened to the conflicting parties without bias, handling the cases point-by-point, till a consensus emerged on who is right or wrong. There was no voting as irreconcilable view points led the Council to postpone the deliberations till another meeting would bring consensus. They handled wide ranging issues that were religious, political, social, economic and juridical in nature.

In his book, \textit{Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism}, Axel-Ivar Berglund, describes the ritual of reconciliation among the Zulu. He says,

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\begin{itemize}
  \item Knighton, “Forgiveness or Disengagement in a Traditional African Cycle of Revenge,” 31.
\end{itemize}
The father comes to [the place], carrying a goat's skin. The women bring the beer. It is placed in a cool place. Water is brought. It is also put away in the shadow. The angry men just remain quiet all the time, saying nothing. One sits in one place and the other in another place. They do not look at each other because of the heat in their hearts. Then the father speaks. He calls them. They come forward. . . . They find themselves sitting opposite each other, facing the father. He calls for water. He calls for ash and the things of the water. He pours ash and imithi into the water. The medicines are the medicines of washing, for this day is the day of purification. He stirs the water until the medicines are well mixed. . . . [one of the two men] washes [his hands] in the water. He speaks to the second, saying "Even you." . . . He says to the first man, "Kipha okusenhlishi wenyi yakho" (speak out what is in your heart). He relates the whole matter according to his point of view, how it started, its growth and the present state. . . . He concludes his speaking by saying, "I have completed my speaking. As for me I am grateful for this opportunity of placing this disturbance before you openly today. There is nothing that is not placed openly as far as I am concerned." The second man [or person] commences speaking, relating the same thing at length from his point of view. . . . He concludes his speaking with words of gratitude for the opportunity to speak openly.44

According to Radikobo Ntsimane, there are slight variations in the above ritual, depending on the place and the time but water is critical in all ritual of reconciliation.45 Coupled with this, the sharing of food and/or drink (ukudlelana) is also essential. It is from this background that Ntsimane cites the case of a Zulu king, who in 1999, exchanged six cows as a symbol of reconciliation with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi after a bitter dispute which had polarised the Zulu Nation.46 Characteristically, African modes of reconciliation are ritualistic, as some involves cleansing and purification, and where symbols such as water are critical components of the process. In turn, rituals and prayers generate awareness of reforming the conscience as a means of offering opportunity for the wrongdoers to be redeemed spiritually, relationally and socially.

4. Reconciling Past (zamani) and the Present (sasa)

Nevertheless, reconciliation, as a paradigm, is a crucial theme in African context. Itumeleng Mosala builds on its importance when he says, “Black people [in South Africa] want to be reconciled with their history, their culture – past

44 A.-I. Berglund, Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism, (Cape Town, Philip, 1976), 323–324.
and present; they want to be reconciled with their religious institutions. This reconciliation is a divine requirement. This outlook may equally serve for the vast majority of the people of Africa – who needs theological reconciliation. That is, reconciliation with God, their fellow human beings and the environment.

In addition, Mosala's contention strikes a working harmony with Robert Schreiter's perception of the signs of our times when he says,

If much of nineteenth-and twentieth-century mission occurred in the framework of colonialism and was often characterized as bringing civilization, education, and health to benighted peoples, and if the next phase occurred in the postcolonial period of nation-building, where mission was expressed in terms of solidarity with struggling people (embodied in dialogue, liberation, and inculturation), then perhaps the dramatic events that frame the end of the century point in another direction. That direction is reconciliation.

Schreiter goes on to say that, reconciliation acknowledges the enormity of the task created by “the consequences of history and the centrifugal powers of the present”, and further that, “reconciliation as a form of mission acknowledges the centrality of truth in a world enmerished in lies, seeks safety and security as the basis for trust, and works toward community in situations of displacement and isolation”.

In his lifetime, Erasmus, the contemporary of Martin Luther during the 16th century reformation, manifested himself as a man of peace who pointed to the man of peace, i.e., Jesus Christ as his model. This was proved both by his lifestyle and his writings: he lived in such a way that observers wondered whether he was more of a Protestant or a Catholic. To avoid hostile confrontations, he opted for criticising indirectly and jokingly. Yet, Erasmus indicated that Christ, more than he, had truth as his weapon of reconciling.

Erasmus reflected on the transfiguration episode (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36) to bring the awareness that the glory of Christ and blissful peace were shown magnificently in the company of the selected three apostles. It is in this extraordinary blissful experience that Peter desired to have permanent “nests” on the mount. A nest, in Erasmus elaboration “is that in which man's (sic) desire is satisfied, in which he tranquilly nourishes his (sic) chicks.
that is, his desires and wants”. He understood Christ as truth personified. This is why, for him, Christ is the worm of peace [read reconciliation] since truth implies peace and, consequently, as Erasmus expounds, our kind of peace should be re-made to fit Christ’s model.

The strength of reconciliation, as a paradigm, is further seen in Robert Schreiter’s words when he says that it “acknowledges the enormity of the task created by the consequences of history and the centrifugal powers of the present”. And further, “reconciliation as a form of mission acknowledges the centrality of truth in a world enmeshed in lies, seeks safety and security as the basis for trust, and works toward community in situations of displacement and isolation”.

Reconciliation, as a Christological paradigm, finds valuable resource in Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation, which the New Testament shows continues even after his death (2 Corinthians 5:19–20). For, after his resurrection, the young man, who the women discovered in the tomb early Easter morning says, “Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just, as he told you” (Mark 16:7). Certainly, these are the disciples who deserted him and fled in Gethsemane. This is Peter who three times denied knowing Jesus (Mark 14:66–72). But as an ideal reconciler, Jesus continues to reconcile humanity to God. Indeed, his resurrection makes the scope of his reconciliation universal. Thus the people, who are members of his body, are called upon to participate in his life as he continues to participate in ours, hence his assurance, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). As a reconciler, thus, Christ plays the role of the African elders who, as peace lovers and initiators, reconciled people in their differences and disputes. Indeed, their main role in the community is to bring calmness, restore peace and harmony. Jesus however as the ideal elder, surpasses their wisdom and skills of managing the affairs of the nation; hence the need to model our reconciliatory skills from him.

On the whole, Christ emerges in the Gospel as a reconciler who is an excellent counsellor worth being imitated. People with different personal problems approached him for help, consultation or advice. Some of them were very prominent people like Nicodemus (John 3). Christ counsels younger people such as Mary and Martha accordingly (John 11). This model will, no doubt, continue to inform the African theology of the twenty-first century and beyond.

52 Erasmus quoted in Dolan, The Essential Erasmus: On mending the peace of the church, 357.
53 Schreiter quoted in Dedji, Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology, 9.
54 Schreiter quoted in Dedji, Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology, 9.
55 See also Milton, “Be reconciled to God! Biblical Theology and Social Praxis,” 97ff.
For Christ did not turn away those who came for help, be it for healing or for socio-doctrinal questions like, “Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (Matthew 22:17). He listened to their problems and responded accordingly. In most cases Christ helped them to seek their own solutions for their own problems by pausing another question (Matthew 22:15–22). This was to inspire the counselee to build confidence on him or herself and overcome whatever sort of stress or depression. It was a way of providing fishing skills rather than just giving a hungry person fish. As a reconciler Christ provides African Christianity with a new working paradigm that we all can draw some vital lessons from.

5. A Critique of Reconciliation Paradigm

As a paradigm for theological reflection in Africa, reconciliation has several faults. First, it assumes that every African predicament deserves a pastoral solution yet some are political, historical, foreign induced, racial, social or economic. Secondly, it fails to acknowledge the diversity and the homogeneity of the African people. That is, some are Christians; others are Muslims while others are Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of African Traditional Religion among others. Thirdly, it also fails to acknowledge other socio-cultural diversities that have shaped, and are reshaping the Africa of the twenty-first century. Fourthly, being seen as part of reconstruction paradigm has weakened the paradigm of reconciliation, yet both paradigms are different – as there can be reconstruction without reconciliation or vice-versa. The fact that the two paradigms are in working dialogues, in some areas such as the South African case after apartheid, makes them to be seen, wrongly, as synonymous. Seen from this perspective, it would appear like a more “secular” paradigm would best inform African theology of the twenty-first century.

Having seen that reconciliation, as a paradigm, cannot be ignored in articulating any African theology or any Christian theology for that matter, this now drives us to appreciate our hypothetical setting that minor paradigms (incul- turation, liberation, reconciliation etc.) and dominant (reconstruction) paradigm in African theology of the twenty-first century work concurrently. The strength of this hypothesis, as a major treatise, in this article, is seen in David Bosch’s insistence that people are habitually and simultaneously dyed-in-the-wool to more than one paradigm. He therefore builds on his contention that old paradigms rarely die completely when he says:

56 Other diversities include race factor, poverty factor, and education as a factor among others.
Martin Luther, whose break with the preceding paradigm was exceptionally radical, in many respects still harboured important elements of the paradigm he had abandoned. The same was true of Karl Barth. Likewise, people who, by and large, still operate within the old paradigm may already embody significant elements of the new. An excellent example of this was Luther’s contemporary, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), who remained within the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm yet at the same time heralded a new era. Edward Schillebeeckx confirms this when he notes:

An analysis of the various – Synoptic, Pauline, Johannine, Petrine, Asia Minor, etc. – traditions in the New Testament makes it clear that, even within what is globally one and the same, albeit varied, conjunctural-cultural period, Christians express their faith within divergent paradigms and models. Striving for one and the same paradigm (in a kind of ideal “theological consensuses”) would lead to an impoverishment of the gospel’s very message, too rich to be contained within one paradigm. “Do not extinguish the Spirit!”

John Mbiti seemingly strengthens the idea of minor and dominant paradigms when he explains about the African indigenous view of the universe, when he writes:

Events [read shifts] come and go in the form of minor and major [read dominant] rhythms. The minor rhythms are found in the lives of the living things of this earth (such as men, animals and plants), in their birth, growth, procreation and death. These rhythms are thought to occur in the lives of everybody and everything that has physical life. The major rhythms of time are events like day and night, the months (reckoned on the basis of the phases of the moon), the seasons of rain and of dry weather, and the events of nature which come and go at greater intervals (such as the flowering of certain plants, the migration of certain birds and insects, famines, and the movement of certain heavenly bodies). All these rhythms [read paradigm shifts] of time suggest that the universe will never come to a halt, whatever changes there may be.

6. Conclusion

The article began by defining the term, “reconciliation” as the movement that makes estrangement (Entfremdung) disappear. It went on to dialogue with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) which was formed

after the newly elected National Assembly passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act in May 1995. While appreciating reconciliation as a critical phase in our African history and practice that offers us a chance to reconstruct Africa holistically, it was able to dialogue with the sharp critiques of Wole Soyinka who feels strongly that there is no genuine reconciliation without reparation. Even though Soyinka does not appear to balance his critique by appreciating that the demand for restitution can further foster resentment and hostility, his views are nevertheless imperative in stirring the debate that will give us the way forward.

The article was also able to establish that genuine reconciliation does not necessarily mean lack of tension. It however means ability to live within the tension, the differences and all sorts of divergences that surround us without loosing the common agenda that makes us one. It is both a process and a goal that makes us say with Jesus “thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6).

The article was also able to establish that in the era of reconstruction, reconciliation as a minor but critical paradigm is inevitable. For we cannot liberate without reconciling; nor can we inculcate without reconstructing. In any case, theology is never done in a cultural vacuum. As such, we cannot carry out the all-important task of reconstruction in a vacuum. Certainly, “let us start rebuilding” Africa of the twenty-first century (cf. Nehemiah 2:18)!

Bibliography


